

Rotary District 7080 DEI Committee Resource: Supporting Members with Disabilities

This resource provides guidance, tips, and best practices to help Rotary District 7080 Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Committee members support individuals with diverse abilities. The goal is to create an inclusive and welcoming environment where every Rotarian feels valued, respected, and able to participate fully.

1. General Principles of Inclusion

- Use inclusive language: say 'people with disabilities' rather than 'the disabled.'
- Ask individuals how they prefer to be supported rather than making assumptions.
- Ensure that meetings, events, and materials are accessible to everyone.
- Encourage an open, respectful culture that celebrates differences and focuses on abilities.
- Model inclusive behaviour and hold others accountable in a compassionate way.

2. Supporting Members with Visual Impairments

- Provide meeting materials in accessible formats such as large print, Braille, or digital text.
- Use high-contrast colours and avoid cluttered visuals in presentations.
- When presenting slides, read aloud what is on the screen.
- Offer assistance when needed but always ask first.
- Ensure walkways and meeting spaces are free of obstacles.
- Describe visual elements and actions when speaking in group settings.

3. Supporting Members who are Hard of Hearing or Deaf

- Ensure good lighting so lip reading is possible.
- Provide captioning or sign language interpretation where needed.
- Use microphones during meetings and ensure sound systems are functioning properly.
- Avoid side conversations during discussions to reduce background noise.
- Face the audience when speaking and speak clearly, not too fast.
- Provide written summaries or minutes of meetings.

4. Supporting Members with Mobility Disabilities

- Ensure all venues are physically accessible, including ramps, elevators, and accessible restrooms.
- Reserve seating that accommodates wheelchairs or mobility devices.
- Allow flexibility for breaks and movement.
- Arrange virtual participation options when travel or access may be a barrier.
- Be mindful of table and podium heights during events.
- Keep pathways clear and wide enough for mobility aids.

5. Supporting Members with Invisible Disabilities

- Recognize that not all disabilities are visible; respect confidentiality and privacy.
- Offer flexibility in participation, such as virtual attendance or modified tasks.
- Create a supportive environment that encourages members to share accommodation needs without fear of stigma.
- Be understanding of variable energy levels, concentration, or mental health needs.
- Incorporate mental health awareness into DEI initiatives.

6. Practical Inclusion Tips for Clubs and Committees

- Conduct accessibility audits of venues and materials.
- Include accessibility statements in all event invitations.
- Provide multiple modes of communication (email, phone, in-person, virtual).
- Train club leaders and volunteers on disability inclusion.
- Establish a feedback system so members can share accessibility challenges.
- Celebrate diverse abilities through awareness campaigns and speakers.

7. Fostering a Sense of Belonging

- Emphasize inclusion in all aspects of Rotary's mission and service.
- Encourage mentorship and peer support for members with disabilities.
- Highlight diverse stories and achievements in newsletters and meetings.
- Ensure all members have opportunities to contribute their skills and talents.
- Remember: belonging happens when people feel seen, heard, and valued.

8. Resources and Further Learning

- Rotary International Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Learning Center
- Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) Guidelines
- Canadian Hearing Society and CNIB Foundation resources
- Mental Health Commission of Canada workplace inclusion resources
- Rotary DEI Committee templates for accessible events and materials

Prepared by the Rotary District 7080 Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Committee
For internal Rotary use and continuous learning.